

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

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Introduction

How do we judge people's wild assertions? By the evidence we're given? By our personal history with them or the stories we know about them? With faith and trust? Or with scepticism and dismissal?

Jesus's assertion that he is the 'bread of life' is a wild one. We may believe it to be true, but for those who first heard it, acceptance would require overcoming what they already took for granted.

As we approach this text, we first take a moment to breathe, to take note of our mood, our capacity to imagine the experience of others, and to prepare ourselves for a story about accepting a truth new to us.

Text

John 6: 35; 41–51

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph,

whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I have come down from heaven?'" Jesus answered them, "Do not complain among yourselves. No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

Comment

They're talking to themselves.

We can almost hear them muttering. 'Is this not Jesus? Joseph and Mary's son. He's lost it. Bread from heaven? What does that even mean? Is that like human manna? What is he on?'

John then tells us that Jesus answers them -- even though they haven't addressed him. He butts in and hurls a new truth at them. He explains in a matter of fact sort of way that what he's dishing out is straight from God. Moreover, he himself is the source of truth, of life, of God's own self.

It's crazy. It's particularly crazy because using the brains that God gave them, the folks gathered can recognise Jesus as one of their own, as the son of ordinary folk from an ordinary town. What they are being asked to accept is that the God of Moses, the great I Am who can never be seen is actually from their hometown and standing in front of them talking gibberish.

Yet it's true. And as reasonable as it may be for the crowd to mutter to themselves about how contrary to their understanding this idea is -- Jesus is right. This is when new, heretofore unbelievable information arrives into their life, the truth that only Jesus can reveal.

As we look at this text with a lens to analyse conflict we note that sometimes -- and more often than we might imagine -- somebody else's insight is crazy only because it is knowledge we have yet to experience. Based on our starting point of what we already know, and what we reasonably assume about people and how the world works, we will be skeptical and need convincing. But sometimes our brilliant minds, which can combine deduction and inference, can be wrong simply because we don't have all the information. Something new to us has to come into view.

How many times is the testimony of a victim dismissed because it doesn't comport with our pre-established understanding? How stuck are we within the groves of preset assumptions, dug in by the weight of generations and generations of inherited narratives? It may take multiple attempts to lever us out of those set positions, and we may pass countless counter-examples before we are able to see them.

And yet it only takes one well placed truth that really is true to upset all the garbage we thought was gold.

We may well be right in the majority of cases to stick with our groupthink, keep talking to ourselves, and remain sceptical to crazy assertions that go against our collective sense of what is right. But when someone is healing what we can't heal and feeding those we can't feed -- it's probably crazier to ignore them, especially when they interrupt our conversation with good news.

Response

Take a moment and think about how much conventional wisdom has changed in our culture over the past decades. What norms that we take for granted now would have been regarded as outrageous or unthinkable the year you were born?

Who were the lone voices, crying out in the wilderness, who now sound like prophets -- perhaps even some from your own home town?

And we are the ones trying to interrupt our private conversations today with experiences and claims we're not ready to accept?

Prayer

God who interrupts,
you give us minds to reason
brains that can detect patterns
and fill in gaps,
and reach correct conclusions
in almost miraculous ways.
And yet,
you also give us faith
to accept what our minds
could not conceive.
Help us to believe
not just your good news,

but the ones who are
trying to share it.
Amen.

Season: Ordinary time

Themes: Conflict Skills